

Syed Imdad Ali Shah
and
Movement for Modern Education
in
19th Century Muzaffarpur, Bihar

Submitted by admin4
6 September 2013 - 3:10pm
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Book:

Contesting Colonialism and Separatism:
Muslims of Muzaffarpur, Bihar, since 1857
Published by Primus (Ratnasagar): Delhi 2014

Internet Link:

http://twocircles.net/2013sep06/syed_imdad_ali_and_movement_modern_education_19th_century_muzaffarpur_bihar.html#.VwU8-dldBA4

The district gazetteer of Muzaffarpur, written by LSS'O' Mally (1907), informs (rather reveals to) us that the college at Muzaffarpur, now named after Langat Singh (1850-1912), was founded by the Bihar Scientific Society, Muzaffarpur. The Bhumihar Brahman Sabha (founded by the Raja of Banaras, at Patna, in 1889) had its annual conference at Muzaffarpur in 1899, where it was decided to open a college for higher education. Therefore, the Sabha deposited an amount of Rs.50 thousand to the Trust of the Bihar Scientific Society, Muzaffarpur (p.134). This amount was provided by the Jaintpur Zamindar, Mahanth Raghunath Das, which was deposited at the Syndicate/Senate of the Calcutta University, to obtain

permission/recognition/affiliation for the college. In July 1899, this college was founded and got the status of a "Second Grade College" (Pre-Graduate). In the subsequent year, i.e., in 1900 A.D; it got the status of "First Grade" college i.e., Degree college.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE BIHAR SCIENTIFIC SOCIETY, MUZAFFARPUR?

On 24th May 1868, the Bihar Scientific Society was set up as the 'British Indian Association' with an objective of 'criticizing the proceedings of the government, and defending the people from oppression by conveying their true complaints to the government', in Muzaffarpur by the then Sadar Amin (Subordinate Judge) of

Muzaffarpur, **Syed Imdad Ali**, who was the founding Secretary as well. In 1872 it became known as Bihar Scientific Society. The aim of the 'Scientific Society' was to bring intellectual, social and moral well-being of the people, spreading knowledge of European sciences through the vernacular and establishment of schools, printing presses, newspaper etc. Arabic and Persian works were also to be collected, lectures had to be delivered. The President of the Society was Nawab Syed Mohd. Taqi, the Raja of Jogiara (Darbhanga), who was also the founder of Zilla School, Muzaffarpur in 1845. The Life Honorary Secretary of the Society was the founder of the college at Aligarh, [Sir] Syed Ahmad [Khan Bahadur, 1817-98].

Most of the details of the activities and achievements of the Society are provided by a French Professor, named Garcin de Tassy (1794-1878), who has published all these details in his annual lectures delivered in a French University. He was a great admirer of the Indian literature and culture.

The Society had its fortnightly newspaper in Urdu called, Akhbar ul Akhyar, launched in September 1868, edited by Ajodhya Prasad Bahaar, who was not only a scholar of Persian but also an author of a book of local history, Reyaz-e-Tirhut (1868)". Garcin de Tassy was the subscriber of the newspaper, Akhbar ul Akhyar. The editorship was succeeded by Munshi Qurban Ali.

Another famous Urdu writer and a freedom fighter, Qazi Abdul Wadood (1896-1984), had read some 31 issues of the newspaper, in 1960, at Patna.

Who Was Syed Imdad Ali?

Imdad Ali's ancestors had distinguished themselves for political and religious wisdom and had rendered important services to the Mughal and British rulers of India. His eleventh forefather, Syed Wajihuddin, came to India in A. D. 1468 and later settled in Bihar complying with the request of Naseeb Shah, the ruler of Bengal. He had a spiritual standing and **Imdad Ali** also had many religious disciples, was considered 'Pir' over greater parts of Bengal, Bihar and what is now known as U. P. The

family history of ***Imdad Ali*** claims that the paternal pedigree of him reached Prophet Mohammad by 33 steps through Syed Ahmad Wali of Turkistan who was universally acknowledged as a ruler and a spiritual leader of Turkistan. His maternal pedigree reached the Prophet by 31 steps through Syed Mohiuddin Abdul Qadir Jilani of Baghdad.

Syed Imdad Ali had started his career as an employee of the revenue department in 1829 and reached up to the post of the Deputy Collector. He subsequently, switched over to the judicial services and became 'Munsif' in 1848, reached up to the post of subordinate judge (Sadar Amin) and retired as such in 1875; went on Haj. He

established a branch of the Society in Bhagalpur, where he settled down. ***Imdad Ali*** was buried at Bhagalpur, and his son Syed Amir Ali (1843-1910) became Deputy Collector in 1864; Amir Ali was personal assistant of the Bhagalpur Commissioner, Ali was nominated in the legislative assembly (1878), became trustee of the MAO College, Aligarh; was Calcutta's Chief Presidency Magistrate (1883-85); was secretary, Central National Mohammedan Association, and he too was buried in his ancestral graveyard of Bhagalpur.

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE SOCIETY:

To set up schools and colleges and make available Urdu translations of the

books of the modern European sciences, history and philosophy.

Syed Imdad Ali expressed that, to have an access to the modern sciences of Europe, it is necessary to make available those books in vernaculars, ie, in Hindustani (Urdu/Hindi). This is what he explained in a letter to SW Fallon, the Inspector of Schools, Danapur, Patna. He further explained that European nations had made progress only because after, 1453 AD, they could get knowledge stored in Latin and Greek languages from Rome, translated into their own mother tongues. This movement came to be known in History as Renaissance. With the efforts of **Syed Imdad Ali** and many others, on 31 July 1870, the Govt. of India

and the Calcutta University on 12th May 1871 agreed to conduct Middle class (Wastaniya) examinations in the Indian vernaculars. By that time, the Society had established about 5 schools in and around the 'city' of Muzaffarpur. The Narhan Zamindar, Parmeshwari Pd. Narain Singh donated Rs. 5 thousand; and the Jaintpur Zamindar, Mahanth Raja Ram Das donated Rs 2 thousand to the Society to set up schools in their respective villages. The Hardi zamindar, Shiv Prasanna Singh, was one of the three vice presidents of the Society, the other being Bhupati Roy. Other zamindars (Estates) also came forward to establish Anglo-vernacular residential schools in their villages.

In a letter written to the Vice Chancellor of the Calcutta University, **Syed Imdad Ali** demanded to establish a college/collegiate school for the pass-outs of the Zilla Schools. According to Garcin de Tasse, On 7th November 1871, the Society laid the foundation stone of "the Muzaffarpur Central College (also called Collegiate), in the centre of the city, amidst mango orchards. On the day right since the early morning, thousands of people gathered there. The Lt. Governor (1871-74), G. Campbell, laid the foundation of the building. **Syed Imdad Ali** delivered a stirring speech in Hindustani (Urdu) whereas Mr Campbell and Mr Fallon addressed in English. Campbell, however did emphasize that in order to pursue higher education, the Indians will have to learn English....".

The Society of **Syed Imdad Ali** also established a department of translation (a Team of translators was paid Rs. 200-300 a month in total). Trigonometry, Materia Medica, Optics, Physiology, Algebra, Mechanics, Philosophy, History, Agricultural Sciences, Masonry etc were the subjects being translated. **Syed Imdad Ali** sent Rs 1000 to Sir Syed Ahmad, during his stay in London (1869-70), requesting him to hire a team of the scholars of the Oxford, Cambridge to prepare syllabi and recommended books to be sent to the Library of the Muzaffarpur's Scientific Society. Qazi Abdul Wadood informs us that the books were sent to Muzaffarpur (for details, see his essay, "Akhbar ul Akhyar, Muzaffarpur aur Sir Syed" published in the

'Fikr o Nazar', Aligarh, July 1960). Garcin de Tassy also authenticates about the library having brought over 200 books from abroad. The Society published several translations in collaboration with the Scientific Society of Aligarh. In 1869, the Society also established, "Anjuman-e-Tehzeeb", to conduct seminars, conferences, researches, debates and social welfare efforts like setting up an orphanage.

In 1872, **Syed Imdad Ali** was transferred to Gaya where he established a branch of the Society and also a school; he retired in 1875, and shifted to Bhagalpur where he settled down. In August 1886, **Syed Imdad Ali** died of a paralytic stroke.

Who was Syed Taqi?

In the efforts of ***Syed Imdad Ali***, his closest companion was [Khan Bahadur] Syed Md. Taqi, who sustained the movement after ***Imdad Ali's*** departure. It would, therefore, be in the fitness of the things, if we could give a brief introduction of him; as he was also the founding President of the Bihar Scientific Society. He was the son of Mir Yusuf Ali Khan and his grandfather was Mir Ghulam Hydar Khan, who was the amil and was killed by the 'Phalsahi (?)' zamindar of Baruraj talluqa, in western part of the district of Muzaffarpur. The dispute was probably around a temple. The killer zamindar (Phalsahi?) was prosecuted and hanged, and his wife and

son were auctioned as punishment and the entire talluqa of Baruraj (having 1356 villages, yielding revenue of Rs 1 lakh) was given to the two sons of Mir Ghulam Hydar, viz. Yusuf Ali Khan and Mehdi Ali Khan as khoon bahaa i.e. wergild (Yusuf Ali Khan was an orthodox shia, always anxious about converting Sunni Muslims to shia, quite a large number of shias in and around Muzaffarpur have converted from Sunni due to the efforts of Yusuf Ali Khan and Mir Jaafar Shah). As said earlier, in 1845, Taqi had donated land for the foundation of the Zilla School, Muzaffarpur, and in 1852 had also earmarked total revenue of a village, Jogiara (now in Darbhanga District), with annual income of Rs 2000, for its upkeep, so that teachers for Urdu, Persian, Arabic and

Sanskrit could be hired. It was only due to this effort that the school could be prevented from being closed down.

THE BIGGEST IRONY:

It is probably an irony that while we do remember the Bhumihar-Brahman Sabha and its members like Langat Singh, Ganesh Dutt Singh (1868-1943) etc., who did a lot for the educational uplift of their caste- fellows, we forget the more significantly progressive, socially all-inclusive contributions of the Bihar Scientific Society and its moving spirits like **Syed Imdad Ali**, Syed Mohd. Taqi, etc.

The LS College got several names at different times. In 1899, it was called Bhumihar-Brahman College, in 1915, Grier

BB College; and in 1951, LS college. In 1920, it constructed two hostels, one named after Duke and another after Langat Singh but the Bihar Scientific Society and its founding Secretary, **Syed Imdad Ali** and the founding President, Mohd Taqi as also the names of the Jaintpur zamindars (Mahanth Raja Ram Das and Mahanth Raghunath Das), and the Hardi zamindar (Bhupati Roy, the vice president of the Society) remains inexplicably un-acknowledged in the entire politics of the nomenclature of the college.

Does it not amount to historical injustice? Will this injustice be undone? If yes, how and when?